

## **CT DECD Economic Strategic Plan Meetings 2007-2008**

### **The Impact of UConn CANR on Connecticut's Economic Development**

Rigoberto Lopez

Acting Department Head, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics  
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (CANR)  
University of Connecticut

Economic development is the improvement of economic wealth and quality of life in a region or community. The economic development role of the University of Connecticut College of Agriculture and Natural Resources includes poverty reduction, food security, consumer health, management and conservation of natural resources, and preservation of culture and heritage. This focus is accomplished through three areas:

Teaching: Educating the labor force and training entrepreneurs for Connecticut agriculture & natural resources,

Research: Generation of new knowledge to solve problems and increase resource productivity, and

Outreach through Cooperative Extension: Transfer of knowledge and assistance to farmers, communities, and businesses.

CANR is focused on improving production agriculture as evidenced by

- ❖ Over a \$10 million investment in animal cloning and biotechnology,
- ❖ Improving ornamental crops through biotechnology,
- ❖ Support to the \$1 billion green industry,
- ❖ Crop insurance education and information for managing risk,
- ❖ Advancing policy proposals to sustain the local dairy industry by the Food Policy Marketing Center, and
- ❖ Improving aquaculture's production through management & addressing diseases.

Improving the natural resource base and environmental quality of the state through

- ❖ The Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) to assist communities for balancing growth and resource protection including NEMO: Non-point education for municipal officials exploring land use decisions,
- ❖ Creating Legislation to preserve farmland (Public Act 490, Purchase of Development Rights Program),
- ❖ Institute for Water Resources to resolve water and related land problems,
- ❖ Forest Stewardship education including wildlife management,
- ❖ Urban and community forestry for an improved quality of life,
- ❖ Initiatives on energy alternatives,
- ❖ Integrated pest management to reduce inputs and improve crop production and the environment, and the New England Invasive Plant Center.



CANR works to improve the quality of life of families and communities through

- ❖ Material well-being but also health, family & community life and environmental sustainability,
- ❖ A \$8.5 million grant from NIH for the Center for Eliminating Health Disparities,
- ❖ Improvements in community food security including towns of greatest insecurity,
- ❖ 4-H Youth Development education focused on leadership and citizenship,
- ❖ Children, Youth, and Families at Risk work in inner cities,
- ❖ Nutrition education, community nutrition, obesity, and food safety,
- ❖ Educational programs to improve health care and health care delivery systems, and
- ❖ The Center for Environmental Health to address matters of concern to the State.

In summary:

- ❖ The UConn College of Agriculture and Natural Resources plays a critical role in the economic development of Connecticut through sustained improvements in agricultural productivity, natural resource use, environmental sustainability, public health and community support to families.
- ❖ The CANR economic development impacts are priceless.



## DECD State Economic Plan Information Forum

Good evening. My name is Virginia Sampietro and I am the Director of Strategic Development with the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board (EWIB). Our Executive Director, John Beauregard, provided testimony at the forum held at Avery Point and focused on Incumbent Worker Training, the program that we feel has the potential for the strongest impact on increasing the skills of the existing workforce.

Tonight, I would like to focus on an effort of a group of non-profit agencies, education entities, workforce boards, and business organizations called the Campaign for a Working CT. The Campaign is "a coalition with an aligned vision for CT: To promote the state's economic competitiveness through the development of sustainable, effective workforce solutions to increase workers' skills and advance families to self-sufficiency."

I am here tonight to urge you to include in your strategic plan, long-term investments specifically geared toward workforce development.

CT's economic success ultimately will depend on its ability to consistently produce a highly skilled workforce with the prerequisite basic and technical skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. With an ever-increasing number of jobs in this state requiring a college degree, the barriers to employment and advancement up the career ladder are substantial for those with limited skills.

- According to the 2000 Census, only 38% of CT adults had postsecondary training - also
- 32% of employers report that poor reading and writing skills are among the most serious skill deficiencies of current hourly production employees.

The needs and skills of CT's businesses and workers are mismatched. Investments in key workforce education and development strategies will strengthen the state's economy by providing businesses with the skilled workforce they need to compete and positioning workers for wage growth. In closing, I would strongly urge that we prioritize investment in CT's existing workforce.



**Testimony of  
Douglas G. Fisher, Northeast Utilities  
(860-665-5105)  
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**Speaker Background:** Doug Fisher is manager of economic development and community relations for NU, based in Berlin. He oversees interstate and state-level economic development for NU's operating companies in Connecticut (CL&P and Yankee Gas), western Massachusetts and New Hampshire. His department also has responsibility for NU's corporate giving and special needs' customer programs. Fisher holds a master's degree in public administration from Harvard's Kennedy School. In 2005-06, Fisher chaired the Governor's Commission for the Economic Diversification of Southeastern Connecticut. He serves on numerous policy boards and previously worked at CBIA and for the state legislature.

**Summary:** Today's Connecticut citizens need to better appreciate the need to grow the state's population and business base. Left unchecked, anti-growth attitudes and complacency will erode our prosperity and economic vigor. Making the case for Connecticut's growth in a new century requires leadership, policy and marketing strategies that can be championed – aggressively and without apology – by the state DECD.

**Commentary:** Connecticut's relative wealth is not a permanent condition. Our wealth today is an historic legacy, brought about by a combination of bold vision and hard decisions made over many decades by public and private sector leaders on matters such as highways, utility infrastructure and energy needs. These leaders agreed on several core concepts, among them:

- growth of our population, especially families with children, is a necessary and laudable goal, vital to Connecticut's future;
- growing the size and number of business establishments in the state is a necessary condition of economic opportunity; and
- at its best, government exists to create conditions where a free and robust market creates growth and opportunity for its citizenry.

Barriers to robust growth in Connecticut are legion, yet more storm clouds continue to gather. For example:

1. Onerous state and local land-use regulations, and the lawsuits they enable, threaten Connecticut's economic prosperity by significantly extending time lines for development. This drives up the cost of doing business, makes housing less affordable, slows job creation and reinforces a negative perception that Connecticut is anti-growth among developers, site selection consultants and their corporate clientele.
2. Efforts to address property taxes and slow what some deride as "suburban sprawl" through state tax increases and greater municipal aid would backfire; such a remedy would, in fact, exacerbate Connecticut's development woes, drive wealth from the state, and serve to stifle development where people and companies may want it most.
3. Government's well-intentioned proclivities to micro-manage the economy and local planning processes are doomed to fail, just as sure as we can never predict or control the direction of next week's stock market.



But our citizens are not united around the need for growth. Instead, certain myths about growth in Connecticut have led to erroneous conclusions and counterproductive public policies. Examples include shaky or false claims that open space and farmland in Connecticut are vanishing at alarming rates; that we're rapidly urbanizing our rural areas; that we're growing in "all the wrong places;" and that property taxes are driving land-use decisions.

Despite a paucity of building permits in the state, slow population growth and negligible job growth over the past 17 years, some of these growth myths are repeated often enough to be taken as facts without any analysis of their underlying data or assumptions. I urge the DECD and other interested citizens to not take such claims at face value, and to instead investigate their foundations. One good place to start is the web site of the Connecticut Partnership for Balanced Growth ([www.cpbg.org](http://www.cpbg.org)).

Rather than fixate on the negative consequences of growth, Connecticut should consider strategies employed by competitor states and regions, such as Raleigh, North Carolina, where huge, family-friendly, speculative neighborhood developments are being built with the stated goal of attracting young professional and working families from the more costly and slow-growing Northeast.

Our future, as a result, is heading south.

As part of its overall growth plan, DECD's public statements and policies need to telegraph that children are again viewed as precious resources and vital to Connecticut's future, not unwanted costs that must be borne by our public schools. Conversely, age-restricted housing developments, viewed as a short-run tax boon by some municipal leaders – places where kids are not only unwelcome but banned — should be exposed for what they are: a mid- and long-term economic drain. Aging populations demand costly services, even as they pay fewer taxes and too often oppose the enhancement or creation of family-friendly community amenities.

In closing, as part of its strategic planning process, I urge the DECD to take the lead in helping to:

- advocate for lower taxes, less regulation, and fewer restrictions on land use to help the state retain its competitive edge, attract development and investment, and robustly grow;
- help communities and the public at large understand and appreciate the need for growth, and to be more welcoming to families; and
- dissect some of the misinformation about growth pushed by certain folks whose primary vision for Connecticut appears to be to preserve the status quo, a strategy that would surely cripple our economy.

Much like a business entity, our state will either grow, or, by necessity, it will stagnate or decline. Let us choose growth.

As a company whose own economic future depends on a healthy Connecticut economy, we at NU stand ready to assist you with research or additional perspective as you may see fit.